

I've talked to Taib about his retirement, says PM
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Prime Minister Najib Razak said he had talked to Abdul Taib Mahmud about stepping down as Sarawak chief minister and he will determine the timing of his resignation.

"I have talked to him and I will find a suitable time for him to step down," he said at a meet-the-people gathering in Serian, about 80km from Kuching, today.

Najib added that he respects Taib's desire to quit politics but cautioned that the long-serving chief minister should not be pressured to quit.

He said that Taib is ready to step down and when the time is right, he will pass the baton to his successor. There is no need to clamour for a change of leadership, said the premier.

In his speech earlier, Taib said he would retire after grooming a new team to take over the helm of the state government.

This is the third time Taib has publicly stated that he wanted to step down as chief minister - the first in Mukah and second in Betong - both at the Sejiwa Senada (One Soul, One Beat) gatherings early this year.

"The possibility for me to retire is getting closer," he said. "I will lead this state elections, but only to make sure that everything will go smoothly.

"I will lead this election so that new blood can come up, but after that, when the people I have groomed can form a new team and can work for this country, for the people of various races, and that these people can work as part of a team, then I will call it a day," said Taib, who has been chief minister since 1981.

Taib, who is also Parti Pesaka Bumiputra Bersatu (PBB) president, said the new team will be both comprehensive and inclusive so that no racial group will feel that they are being marginalised.

"This is our team that I want to form because this is the aim of BN - not the aim of Taib or one chief minister. This is our dedication, our philosophy and our commitment to the people of Malaysia," he said.

He said forming a united and capable team to govern Sarawak was crucial as the new leaders must give priority to serving the people.

"That is why I want the people to look at the coming elections as a time for us to showcase our contribution to racial harmony and unity, so that we can continue our work for the people," he said.

New leaders must be trained first

Stressing that he has long served Sarawak, Taib added: "I know one day, I have to leave. I am old, but my ambition is to live on and to work for the people's benefit as long as possible."

He said while there is a need for changes in the BN, the leaders who will take over must be trained first.

"I have groomed many people in my life. Today, only two remain in PBB. In the BN government, only me and (Deputy Chief Minister Alfred) Jabu are still around. When we leave, who will take over from us and do the tasks successfully?"

On the coming elections, which is expected to be held next month, he said only those who are capable and have the necessary qualifications will be picked as candidates.

"We have to look for people who want to serve and that is why we gather more of them to find out their qualities and dedications. We want those leaders who can come up with new ideas.

"I am grateful that some PBB leaders have expressed their desire to step down and make way for new blood," he said.

Taib, although did not name names, was referring to Minister of Infrastructure Development and Communitons Michael Manyin as one of those veteran leaders who will not be defending their seats in the coming elections.

The chief minister urged those who are stepping down to help the greenhorns in the election campaign.

"That is the best dedication that you can give to BN. I can tell you there is no other party in Malaysia which has such a high spirit of dedication to serve the people," he said.

'Taib not stepping down anytime soon'

In an immediate reaction, DAP supremo Lim Kit Siang said that Taib was not stepping down any time soon.

This is obvious from his latest very elaborate political dance which he had choreographed over his intended resignation as Sarawak chief minister.

"Cutting through all the verbiage and verbosity indulged by Taib, the message is very clear: Taib will lead BN into the state general election expected next month and he will continue as Sarawak chief minister after the polls.

"Reason? Taib has not yet been able to groom a successor," he said in a statement emailed to Malaysiakini.

Lim said that Taib still has a long way to go before he is ready to hand over the reins of Sarawak state government to his successor.

"This can take anything from one year to five years as he may have to keep trying (to groom) 'a new team'.

"As there is not only no successor at present but the new team has yet to be formed and tested, Taib's stepping down as Sarawak chief minister is far into the distant horizon."

According to Lim, the chief minister's "elaborate political dance" is meant to pull the wool

over Sarawakians' eyes that he had overstayed his welcome as CM.

"It will be known soon enough whether Sarawak voters are so gullible that such a political ploy and bluff can work so as to return Taib for another term as Sarawak chief minister.

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